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# The Practical Organisation of Space, Interaction, and Communication in and as the Work of Crossing a Shared Space Intersection

(doi: 10.2383/88200)

Sociologica (ISSN 1971-8853)

Fascicolo 2, maggio-agosto 2017

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# Left to Their own Devices? The Practical Organisation of Space, Interaction, and Communication in and as the Work of Crossing a Shared Space Intersection

by Robin James Smith

doi: 10.2383/88200

## 1. Introduction

This article examines the ways in which people socially organize space, interaction, and communication in the context of a “shared space” intersection. The analysis draws on video materials in aiming to further ethnomethodological studies of visually available order in public space [Lee and Watson 1993; Watson 2005 and 2015; Hester and Francis 2003]. In this sense, the article approaches space, interaction, and communication non-ironically [Watson 2005]. That is to say that, I do not theorise about the ways in which people go about moving in and through public space, the relation between space (as structure) and action (as agency), or power, or how space is turned in to place, nor, indeed, about what public space is or is not. The article is, instead, concerned with how members co-produce and organise the lived detail of a highly mobile setting in which they themselves are participants for local, practical, purposes. Before arriving at the things themselves, I present a discussion of the ethnomethodological treatment of pedestrian mobility practices, contextualized against a formal “ironic” treatment of space. I briefly discuss the broader context of “shared space” intersections, and introduce some ideas from the sociological literature that begin to account for how shared space, and interaction in public more generally, might work. In doing so, I make trouble for some of these familiar ideas, before introducing the analysis of membership practices for the organisation of space, mobility, and, specifically, for “communicating” attention, recogni-

tion, and relevancy. I describe instances of non-verbal interaction between shared space users and focus, in particular, upon how pedestrians negotiate and produce space when walking together and in concert with the drivers of vehicles. The article concludes by emphasizing the contribution of an ethnomethodological treatment of space.

## **2. An Ethnomethodological Treatment of Street-level Social Order: The Case of a Shared Space Intersection**

Shared space intersections are an urban design intervention in which common resources of the traffic system – lanes, stop signs and lights, pavements, pedestrian crossing, and various material means of segregation and determining matters such as “right of way” – are removed. Combining transport planning and urban design, “shared space” has become popular in transport engineering and urban street planning [CABE 2008; DfT 2007 and 2011; Hamilton-Baillie 2008; Monderman *et al.* 2006] with “shared space intersections” appearing across Europe. “Shared space” acts as an umbrella term for a series of urban design interventions geared to “democratise the street.” This lofty aim is to be achieved by encouraging greater care, increased interaction between road users, and lower vehicle speeds by removing the usual and expected priority and demarcation markings of the street. Pavements are made level with the road (although often visually distinguishable by coloured paving). Car, bike and bus lanes, stoplights, crossing points, and other material resources are removed. Users are thus required to decide for themselves – turn-by-turn, moment-by-moment, for each next first time through – matters of priority, right of way, direction of movement and so. Whilst there is evidence to suggest that shared space intersections do promote “better” traffic flow and reduce accidents, there has been criticism of the strategy both in terms of its positioning as a panacea for the urban mobility and congestion problem [Moody and Melia 2013] and in reports and research which see shared space schemes as placing vulnerable groups and persons in harm’s way [Imrie 2012]. Clearly much of the concern with shared space is bound up with and glossed under “eye-contact,” physical capabilities and assumed capacities for symmetrical non-verbal communication and coordinated movement. Indeed, a recent BBC news tweet posed the question: “Cars, bikes and pedestrians all using the same road/path – genius or chaos?” I do not engage with the debate surrounding shared space, here, but would suggest that shared space is neither genius nor chaos. What is certain is that it relies a good deal upon members’ own competencies for the

organization of the space, communication; the detail of which is the central concern of the article.

The article adopts an ethnomethodological orientation to the question of the order of shared space. The analysis is ethnomethodological in that it remains with *how* people assemble social order, together, in such a way that it is observable in the abundantly available way it is. As with studies of other contexts, an ethnomethodological sociology of space

[...] starts out with what might be called the “common-sense appearances of the social world” and then seeks to describe how they will have been produced “from within” such that they do indeed have the appearances that they have [Hester and Francis 2004, 26].

In this sense, the social order readily observable by members and social scientists in public settings is not treated as a resource for the theorization of “urban life” or “mobility” or “public space.” That the world has about it an available observability is, instead, taken as the beginnings of an inquiry in to the production and recognisability of that order in the first instance, as an ongoing local practical accomplishment in the course of and as relevant for people’s activities. This marks a stark departure from formal social scientific treatments that reify “space” and proceed to treat spatialized social order – and its relation to matters like “behaviour” or “experience” – as a social scientific puzzle to be resolved through recourse to theory and/or innovations in social scientific method. This analysts’ perspective finds people strolling in cities as flaneurs, people driving cars as hybrid assemblages [Dant 2004], and cyclists as cyborgs [Jones 2005]. Whilst these are useful contributions to social scientific theory, such treatments have little to do with the activities and concerns of members;

[They] risk “*hiding the phenomena*” behind an analysis of the forces that supposedly shape the form, structure and experience of (a given activity or setting) [Tolmie and Rouncefield 2013, 5].

Indeed, concerns with space and communication have been central to the development of formal analytic sociology, famously underpinning the work of the Chicago School, and, in particular, as regards urban interaction and communication and the consequent effects upon social distance and connectedness [Park 1925, 8]. By turns “space” has been treated as a grid like backdrop, or “bucket” for social action [see Laurier 2005], or reduced to a measurable, physical, phenomena, with “place” used as a gloss for matters concerning culture and subjective experience. In more recent social science constructions that recognize space as dynamic, fluid, and relational, there yet remains a sense that space exerts some kind of silent influence upon the organisation of things, and mobility in particular, in which people are, in different

ways, treated (to adapt Garfinkel's phrase) as "judgmental spatial dopes." Even within the notion of an "action orientated geography" [Werlen 1993] or the "spatial" and "mobilities" turn, there remains a neglect of an attention to *how* space and place are *socially organised*; that is, in and through the description of their activities, and from the perspective of members' own orientation to these orders. This is largely due to the ways in which the social organisation of space – much like that of interaction and communication – is routinely treated with a "natural attitude." As described by Crabtree:

The visibility or observability of spatial arrangements is a precondition of their sociality. For the ordinary member of society matters to do with spatiality – walking, shopping, displaying intimacy, driving, finding the bathroom etc. – are not deep mysteries only open to adepts, but practical matters consisting of "what anyone knows" about the organisation of the world in which they live. That is, the ordinary, spatially distributed world of members is an intelligible world for members; a world that is encountered as recognisable, observable, reportable, publicly available and accountable, a world in which spatial arrangements exhibit a mutual intelligibility. Thus, in everyday life we can recognise places where we can catch buses or trains, places where we can eat, places where we can report crime, buy groceries, go without invitation, drive, not drive (etc.), and perform a huge variety of social activities with which a sense of space and spatial arrangement is intimately connected, and interwoven, as a readable feature of the settings those arrangements make observable. [2000, 27].

In attending to the practices in and through which participants to a shared space intersection contribute to its order, this article contributes to a growing body of ethnomethodological and conversation analytic work concerned with the ways in which "space" is organised and made relevant in and for interaction on the move.<sup>1</sup>

These interdisciplinary studies have further developed early studies of mobility, interaction, and walking practices [e.g. Ryave and Schenkein 1974; Psathas 1976]. They have drawn upon, primarily, conversation analytic principles and, indeed, have been key in the incorporation of the analysis of embodied, multimodal, practice alongside the more traditional concern with talk-in-interaction in sociology, human geography, and socio-linguistics [see Mondada 2016]. Recent work has focalised walking, in particular, as embedded in and central to different social and interactional contexts, for example, the coordination of group movements and the asking and answering of questions in a guided tour [De Stefani 2010; De Stefani and Mondada 2014; Mondada 2017], the production of "meaningful places" during instruction sequences [Broth and Lundstrom 2013], or the organisation of walking through a re-

<sup>1</sup> See, in particular, papers introduced by McIlvenny *et al.* [2009 and 2014]; also, Haddington *et al.* [2013].

volving door [Weilemann *et al.* 2014], or navigating with a smart phone [Laurier *et al.* 2016]. Other studies have focused on communication whilst driving [see Haddington 2010; Laurier *forth.*]. The contribution of these studies, then, is the explication of the sequential and multimodal organisation of embodied interaction (talk, gesture, movement, glance) and recruitment or negotiation of present material resources in accomplishing a given communicative or interactional practice in motion. Indeed, such studies have both moved beyond previously static accounts of social interaction and described the ways in which walking and talking, for example, are mutually constitutive practices exhibiting intertwined organisations [Mondada 2017].

Whilst this article draws upon conceptual and methodological insights from these studies, it is primarily aligned with the ethnomethodological concern with the practical objectivity and mutual intelligibility of the “common place scene” as accessible through an attention to membership categorization analysis [see, for example, Lee and Watson 1993; Hester and Francis 2003]. Indeed, whilst much has been accomplished by conversation analytic studies, there have been fewer ethnomethodological and perhaps surprisingly few MCA studies of interaction in public space in which present persons are understood, in a broader sense, to be the “staff” of a scene, engaged in that scene’s work [Garfinkel 2002]. In a similar manner to the contribution of those studies described briefly above to conversation analytic approaches, the article also aims to further the analysis of categorization practices beyond talk-in-interaction [see also, Reynolds 2017; Evans and Fitzgerald 2017; Smith 2017]. Whilst contributing to studies of mobile interaction more generally, the article is, more specifically, concerned with further explicating members’ methods in and through which the lived local order of a given setting is ongoingly accomplished in such a way that renders it *accountable* [Garfinkel 1967].

The ethnomethodological concern with the observable-accountable social order is regularly described in terms of members’ methods of “production-recognition.” Members’ produce their conduct in such a way that it is recognisable for what it is, and there are methods for recognising what it is that is getting done by other parties. In this sense, arrival at any “public space” or commonplace scene – such as joining a freeway [Garfinkel 2002] – involves the work of orientation to participation in producing that scene’s ongoing orderliness;<sup>2</sup> that is, “what is going on here?” and “what next?”. We might note, then, that spatial activities display a visually available order bearing family resemblance to the organisation of conversation in terms of sequences of turn-taking

<sup>2</sup> This is, of course, a more general principle of ethnomethodology’s programme [Garfinkel 2002] – that Durkheim’s immortal society is the accomplishment of members’ situated, contingent and practical work, seen first time through, just at that time, then and there in any such a case.

and the situated use and hearing of categories, devices, and associated predicates [Sacks 1995; Hester and Eglin 1997; Watson 2015]. Yet, following Watson [2005] *inter alia*, rather than only noting that the social order of public space is visually available, we should proceed to an examination of *how* members' both recognise "visual indications" and produce matters as visually available in the first instance as a "pair" which exhibits a "back-and-forth reflexive constitution" [2005, 215], on the go. Such an analysis is thus sensitive to the situated and dynamically paired arrangement of production (of an action) and recognition (of that action's procedural relevancy and consequentiality for ongoing next actions) as handled by members in the course of building any given activity or phenomena. Watson [2005] goes on to note, however, that the distinction between production and recognition suggested in the notion of the "pair" might obscure the sense in which members themselves experience production/recognition as a "unitary texture of relevances" [2005, 218] and might lead back to an ironic take on the lay observation of social order in public space. I elaborate upon this point below in describing the ways in which actions are designedly and observably not produced for a generic or general audience but are occasioned and timed in relation to prior actions and produced *for* particular observers in such a way that displays a category relationship with a given mover. In this sense, the analysis explicates how the scene's "staff" [Garfinkel 2002] requiredly display to and for one another a shared sense of that scene's order and participation in its ongoing construction in

locally building, together, the developing organisation of their mutual passage.  
[Livingston 1987, 22].

More recently, however, both Watson [2005 and 2015] and Liberman [2013 and forth.] have critiqued the conceptual use of this pairing, with Watson questioning the separability of procedures for "producing" and "recognising" and Liberman questioning the sense of what is being produced, what might be said to be "doing producing," and to what end. Both critiques turn on the understanding that social order is autochthonous [Garfinkel 2002; Garfinkel and Livingston 2003]. In this sense, the order of any given scene should not be understood as produced in and through individual members' particular concerns or planned actions. Ethnomethodologists use the term "member" in avoiding individualization; "member" does not refer to "individual person," and "membership" does not refer to an individuals' demographic or social group status or category or biography or a general sense of belonging to a "group" or "culture" but, rather, to the competencies and "mastery" of natural language [Garfinkel and Sack 1970, 342; also Sharrock 1974]. In developing the sense in which membership is bound up with situated, shared, and public ac-

accomplishments of knowing, reasoning, and practical objectivity, Ken Liberman has, across a number of studies, demonstrated the sometimes arrational formulation of action; that is, members are not always, and perhaps seldom, acting strategically and, more regularly, often do not know the meanings of their actions until it is revealed later in the course of events. Social order, including spatial order, is thus a radically emergent phenomenon and, significantly, as Liberman has recently reminded us:

according to Garfinkel, it is the setting that is doing the producing, not the individual members. [forth.].

In what follows, I describe something of the work of the shared space setting employed in the ongoing accomplishment of movement in and through the space, as that setting's observable work. I begin, however, with something of the context of the setting and the work of Erving Goffman. Goffman too suggests an analytic attention to settings rather than individual actors (although this is not widely understood), but, of course, was primarily concerned to highlight the various ways in which actors manage, negotiate, and exploit interaction order; his discussion of the "traffic system" being both relevant to this article, and a worthwhile point of comparison to an ethnomethodological understanding of public space.

### **3. Interaction in Public (Shared) Space**

In considering how shared spaces "work," we can begin where some analyses might end, with the writings of Erving Goffman. The relationship between space, communication, and interaction is central to his work in a number of ways. His early remarks on such matters recognized the requirement for analysts to find a warrantable means of introducing to the analysis of communication and "language" the ways in which communicative practices – utterances, gestures and so on – are intelligible in and through the immediate environment in which they are produced [Goffman 1964]. Goffman's [1963 and 1972] later writings on behaviour in public space are at once well know and underappreciated in sociology. I introduce them here to demonstrate both the ways in which space, communication, and interaction *might* be handled in shared space, in addition to demonstrating that there is more to be said.

Particularly relevant for this article are Goffman's [1972] remarks that at given junctures where road traffic interfaces with pedestrian traffic, "the participant must trustfully put himself in to the hands of others" [1972, 27-28]. This "trust" manifests in situations where participants might be said to assume the efficacy of "body glosses" [*Ibidem* 31] and "intention displays" [*Ibidem* 32]. In Goffman's words:



In driving and walking the individual conducts himself – or rather his vehicular shell – so that the direction, rate, and resoluteness of his proposed course will be readable. In ethological terms, he provides an “intention display.” By providing the gestural prefigurement and committing himself to what it foretells, the individual makes himself into something that others can read and predict from; by employing this device at proper strategic junctures – ones where his indicated course will be perceived as a promise or warning or threat but not as a challenge – he becomes something to which they can adapt without loss of self-respect [Goffman 1972, 31].

The “intention display” device provides for sequential stages of communicating to co-present others the next actions of the individual actor: [proper strategic junctures]; [gestural prefigurement]; [reading and predicting]; [direction, rate and resoluteness]. Here, however, we find the rational strategic individual and, as is common across Goffman’s work, the looming figures of competition and shame. So, as we shall see below, people might well “communicate” to others their intent, but they do so in highly specific ways that are embedded in and exhibit the context in which they are seen. Equally, Goffman was always quick to point out how any such trusting arrangement is apt for exploitation by those who seek to use the assumed arrangement of “normality” to their advantage. Certainly, there are many instances where this gets done. Liberman’s [2013] study of the crossing of Kincaid, for example, found pedestrians<sup>3</sup> employing the method of “doing being oblivious” to cross a busy intersection. By stepping out in to the road without engaging in the kind of attention displays to the road traffic described below, pedestrians exploit the “trust” that drivers will not drive in to them in order to do crossing the road without being “invited” to do so. Yet, for the most part, participants in public scenes are not out to exploit, con, or get one over one another. Thus, in the ethnomethodological sense, “trust” refers to the shared background expectancies and competencies of members participating in the constitutive practices of that scene [Garfinkel 1963; Watson 2009]. Indeed, Watson [2005] and Hester and Francis [2003, 46] respectfully take issue with Goffman’s attention to matters that in some way are remedial of the breakdown of order; the latter noting that the Goffmanian version of the street scene is one

driven by an analytic preoccupation with matters such as defensiveness, danger and the possibility of threat. To be sure, there may be sites that we enter with such

<sup>3</sup> One might argue that this is a “promiscuous” category use; that unless you can find a member vocalizing that category then it has been introduced “from the outside.” But these are people moving on foot, in an urban environment, which is itself at least partly designed in relation to and for the relevancy of categories such as “pedestrian” and “driver”. Such categories are thus relevant and applicable in relation to the “traffic system” collectivity and, moreover, can be shown to carry moral obligations and “rules” of application both in talk and in relation to the “proper” running of that system [see Smith 2017].

concerns in mind but we doubt that they comprise members' orientations as a general matter of course [Hester and Francis 2003, 46].

What *does* occupy members' orientations as they move in public space and *how* such matters are visually available and "built in to the ordinary workings of settings where no 'remedy' seems perceivedly required" [Watson 2005, 207] is thus to be explicated in the remainder of the article.

#### **4. Notes on Data, Method, and Setting**

The video data analysed and described in this article were produced in the "shared space" of Seven Dials, Covent Garden, London. Seven Dials is, as the name suggests, characterized by seven streets converging to form a central hub. The seven streets are lined with clothes shops, coffee shops and restaurants, as well as a number of offices. The area itself is close to Covent Garden and London's theater district. The streets are open to cars and delivery vans – although some are one-way streets – and the area is a busy one.

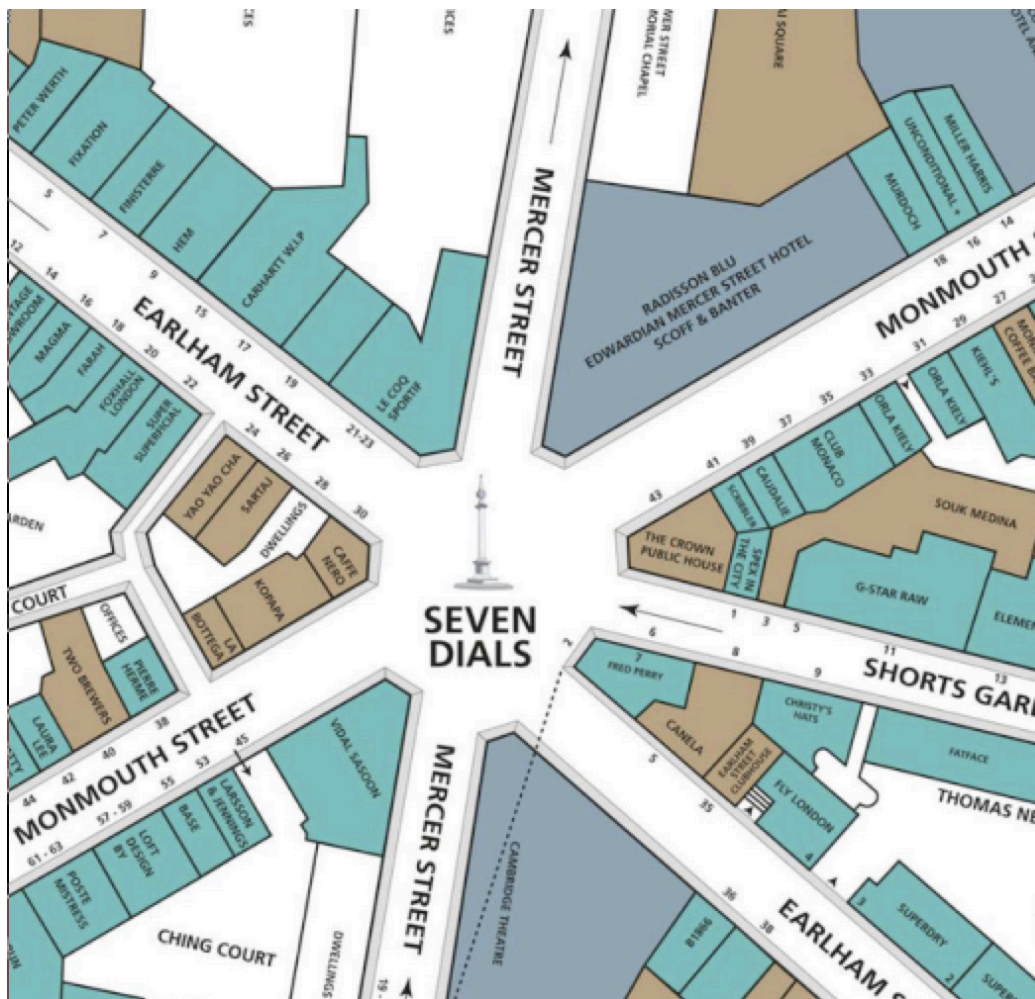


FIG. 1. Map of Seven Dials.

Source: <https://www.sevendials.co.uk/find-us/>

The site itself finds people constantly arriving on the scene in a large variety of ways. Indeed, Seven Dials (and, I think, shared space more generally) first came to my attention as a pedestrian. Wandering along what I thought was a pedestrianized street, I carried on straight in the central space of Seven Dials, and straight in to the path of a taxi that was making its way around the central “island.” This snapped my attention from whatever it was I was thinking about at the time and in to the business of figuring out the grounds of participation in that scene [Garfinkel 2002]: how had I ended up “in the road?” Following this initial encounter and subsequent initial observations of the setting, I returned on two separated occasions and recorded five hours of video data. The videos were produced with static cameras (one was a standard DSLR camera, the other a small dedicated HD video camera) positioned at different points during the visits to “best” capture arrivals, negotiations and crossings.

There were also practical considerations of where it was possible to sit or stand with a camera for any length of time.

The particular focus of the analysis – on persons arriving at and making their across Seven Dials – means that there were literally hundreds of cases to study, many occurring simultaneously within any given strip of data. Video materials enable the analyst to “deal with the actual detail of actual events” [Sacks 1995b, 26] but should in no way be taken as some kind of direct empirical record of the scene. Video remains a resource for the recovery of the participants’ perspective of the work moving through the scene in concert with others. As noted above, I was not interested in generating “themes” or “codes” from the materials, but rather in approaching the materials through “unmotivated looking” thus “giving theory a rest” [Laurier 2010]. Attempting to draw out the participants’ perspective on the organization of the setting is, in ethnomethodological terms, an effort to find in publically witnessable practices the ways in which members are themselves analysing the emergent organization of the setting as they contribute to it, and video is an increasingly common technology for recovering this detail.

Whilst Harvey Sacks was sceptical about the use of video data due to the introduction of elements that we could not be certain of as analysts (unlike, say, the timing of a silence in conversation), video does enable the repeated viewing of the detail of events that happen simultaneously or very quickly or, as in the case of these data, where a goodly number of actions and events are taking place simultaneously. Video can be viewed frame by frame in order to access the sequences in which things happen and in which a given action is embedded or, rather, what it is that that action is recognizing and the way in which the production of that action is of consequence for what happens next. It is also worth retaining a scepticism toward video data in such a way that guards against an unwarranted naturalism. The video does not enable access to what “really happened” but, rather, enables what Livingston [1987] referred to as “technical access” to the things that members are orienting and the local methods and displays of social and moral order. Indeed, it is worth recalling that Sacks himself said:

But social activities are observable, you can see them all around you, and you can write them down. The tape recorder is important, but a lot of this can be done without a tape recorder. If you think you can see it, that means we can build an observational study [Sacks 1995a LC1, 28].

So, the examples described here are not intended to be “representative” of what always goes on in Seven Dials and certainly not in “shared space” writ large but, rather, are intended to give the reader access to the kinds of (mundane and

miraculous) things that constitute the “haeccities” or “just thisness” [Garfinkel 2002] of the organization of just those movements through this setting, that *can be* and were getting done by members as discoverable, and only discoverable, in the materials analysed.

What is described in the remainder of the article are some of the methods in and through which people moving on foot negotiate, produce and adjust their trajectories, and manage space socially. As in the production of conversation’s sequential turn-taking order, members work to “read and predict” [Goffman 1972, 31] and coordinate trajectories in such a way that minimises a requirement for abrupt adjustment by others, thus maintaining the “flow” of the site. And one of the key methods for doing so is found and evidenced by the situated intelligibility of a members’ method that I will call here “attention displays.” In this sense, attention is shown to be publicly exhibited and inspectable in such a way that bears a procedural consequentiality for the mutual organization of movement. A range of examples demonstrate the ways in which the work of displaying attention is sequentially and categorially organized in relation to the coordination of trajectories in and through the space, and present material arrangements. The article also attends to this specifically in relation to the ‘recruitment’ and ‘dismissal’ of material resources in the setting. Here I describe the activities of “doing attention” and “getting out of the way;” “adjusting trajectories together;” and “recruiting and dismissing resources.”

## 5. Doing Attention and “Getting Out of the Way”

A common first response to these video data is the offering a rule that provides for what it is that the viewer has observed. The operating rule readily observable in shared space settings is that “pedestrians get out of the way of cars” (or variants thereof, such as “cars rule” or “pedestrians must not slow cars” or “no one must cause another to stop”). These are all valid observations in the sense that they can be seen, there, in the data and in the setting itself. But the question as I have outlined above, is how is it that the order of the scene is put together in such a way that these “rules” can be observed and accounted for by an “auditor” [Garfinkel and Sacks 1970] whether present in the scene or recovered through video data?

In the first examples, two pedestrians independently deploy a similar method for displaying a “noticing” and an ongoing attention to vehicles arriving on the scene. This noticing and ongoing attention appears tied to the work of “getting out of the way” in a specific orderly, which is to say account-able, manner. This accountability appears, in part, to turn on a display of attention through a bodily orientation to

the driver of the car, and a quickening of the pace of walking for a few steps that is, I suggest, demonstrably *for* the driver of the vehicle to recognise in terms of its emergent consequentiality. We might call this a “moral quickstep” in that it is repective of and displays the setting’s moral order: the action is done in the context of an emergent sequence-category relationship where “pedestrian” and “driver” are made relevant through a categorial relationship, and relational pair, of something like “mover/arriver” and “impeder” in which the former’s trajectory across the space is likely to be interrupted or stalled by the latter’s. This is not as clear cut as serial phenomenon such as queueing or, indeed, overtaking (where “overtaker” and “overtaken” is relevant). In this case, the first set of categories is relevant and through the second in that a predicate of “pedestrian” is an expectation of manoeuvrability against the relatively more rigid nature of the trajectory of a vehicle (this relation was also noted, in different terms, by Goffman [1972]) and it also tied to category-relevant spatial devices (Smith, 2017). It is through this relation that we might say that there is an expectation upon pedestrians to not be in the way of drivers, further enforced through the ambiguity of the categorisability of the central space as a “road” (and thus tied to the act driving); ambiguous, that is, until a vehicle arrives. The “quickstep” action is, then, viewable in and through the context of producing as recognisable the rule of not making others (and pedestrians not making drivers, in particular) unduly adjust their course. Key to this observation, however, is that the actions of the “pedestrians” are concerned to show that “attention” to the scene and its work is being done, that a specific “noticing” has been done (of an arriving “driver” or “vehicle”), and that *that* noticing is of consequence for their ongoing movement through the space, and, thus, the quickening of the pace is done *for* a specific observer (the driver of the car), as relevant for their movements as the emergent order of the setting.



FIG. 2. a-d.

Source: Author's Photo.

In the first example (fig. 2), a pedestrian enters the main space from the far side street from the camera. This “arrival” is furnished with the display of an active “scanning”, observable here and for the local cohort as a display of a general orientation to the scene and crossing’s work. As he enters the central Seven Dials space, he turns his head to his left toward the next entrance (fig. 2a), to a point up above the street level, before returning his orientation to his trajectory, and then slightly to his right. Although it cannot be said when the man “sees” the van arriving on the street to his left, we can assume that the van is recognizably continuing on its path in to the space in and through the actions of a woman (far right, fig. 2b) who comes to a somewhat abrupt halt at the edge of the “pavement” in order to let the van pass. Although he continues on his trajectory he visibly orientates to this point of potential trouble, holding the direction of his head for five steps before looking away, briefly, and then back to the van (now visible in the video, Fig. 2c), and again with a greater degree of head turning toward the van (fig. 2c). Tied to this “attention display” is an adjustment of his trajectory, curving to his left, cutting across the path of van and toward the “pavement.” It is at this point that he initiates a “quickstep” (fig. 2d) for two paces. A visible orientation to the van is maintained – through the holding of the head slightly to his left and for three “normal” (in relation to his previous pace) steps after. He then disengages from the “attention display” and carries on around the circle toward his original waypoint.





FIG. 3. a-d.

Source: Author's Photo.

In the above example (fig. 3) a man is stood in the central space visibly asking for directions from a group gathered at the side of the road. On presumably completing his search for information, the man pivots way from the group and out in to the “road” whilst briefly holding his attention there in doing some kind of good-bye/thanks (fig. 3a). At the same time, a van approaches to his right. He displays a noticing of the van in holding his head in that direction. As in the previous example, this initial orientation is extenuated through head/body torque toward the van before disengaging from that orientation and entering in to a brief jog for five steps. As before, the pedestrian maintains a slight orientation of the head toward the van for the duration of this move.<sup>4</sup> “Attention” here, is publically available in that it *displayed* in movements of the head and body, not the eyes or with “sight” per se.

We can note how, on noticing an arriving vehicle, both members adjust their trajectories toward the “pavement.” This seems relevant for participants in that that category of mover and that category of space might be treated as a “home position” for pedestrian when faced with potentially “breaching” the order of “the road” (pedestrians “belong” on pavements, not “in roads” with vehicles). We might also con-

<sup>4</sup> Although the role of this “look work” is less clear cut as the man may well have been looking for a street name or direction at the time, readable through his asking the group directions at the start of the sequence, he continues on in a direct and certain manner toward the next street.



sider that, in other shared spaces where a pavement is entirely absent, this categorially ordered “getting out the way” might similarly be done through a return to a “home position”, thus producing a “pavement” where there is in none. In this example, we also see something of the situated observability of “trajectory” not in terms of some spatial or geometric formulation but, rather, in and through the gestalt contexture of category, action, and space in “reading” a likely destination for that class of mover. People do not move randomly. It is not only the fact that pedestrians have committed to a trajectory that matters but that they might reasonably be expected to be heading to the pavement. Again, this points to the ways in which the intelligibility of action is produced in and through the setting. This also makes trouble for the rational spatial actor of planning models who might be expected to take a “direct” or “shortest” or, even, “safest” route through space.

Visible in these examples, and in different ways in the ones that follow, is the emergent organisation of the phase of initial “noticing” or “seeing” the oncoming vehicles as discernable from and then followed by a stage of “negotiation” (what presumably leads to the gloss of “eye contact” in other analyses). Here, “looking” and *then* “looking away” appear to operate at particular moments in the co-accomplishment of mobility and navigation. The orientation of the attention display appears to open and then close “assessment” and “negotiation” phases. Once matters are appearedly settled, for practical purposes, the display of “full” attention to a specific co-present member can be dropped. This is followed by a lesser but continued orientation, whilst the decided course of action is carried out, at the close of which orientation to *that* trouble can be dropped or shifted to another task. Displaying attention is the demonstration of a “proper orientation” [Lee and Watson 1993] not necessarily or only to ones’ trajectory but as a “staff member” of the scene participating with an “openness” to the way in which the designing of their own emergent – that is to say, in no way preplanned but ongoingly designed – course of action. More of this work is described below in relation to members of a “with”<sup>5</sup> [Goffman 1972; also, Ryave and Schenkein 1974] moving through the space, together.

## 6. Adjusting Trajectories, Together

In the following examples, “attention displays” are jointly accomplished in the course of two people walking together in a “with.” The two “withs” described here employ different methods of managing and adjusting trajectories. Whilst the work

<sup>5</sup> “A with is a party of more than one whose members are perceived to be together” [Goffman 1972, 41].

of the attention display in bringing these adjustments off remains similar, the second case demonstrates an example of a member not displaying proper attention to the scene and the way in which this is handled by a co-walker.

In the first example (fig. 4, below) two males are making their way across the centre of the setting from the far side, toward the camera. As they do so, they jointly display an orientation to the setting through what appears as the shared work of scanning for possible impediments to their course. The male on the left appears to “take the lead” in relation to the trajectory of the with, walking slightly ahead of his companion. The other “follows” whilst also visibly scanning his head to his left and the streets from which vehicles might be expected to appear. The two men organize themselves in to a very brief “stop” (fig. 3c) in order that a vehicle (a mini-van) can pass through the space. Shortly after the pair must also adjust for second vehicle (a taxi). Of interest, here, is not simply that the with relinquishes the claim to “their” trajectory to “get out of the way” of the vehicles but, rather, *how* they accomplish this adjustment in such a way that it is publically available and readable by the driver for whom it is designed. The point being, they don’t just stop, but do so in a highly contextual manner that provides for the ongoing order of the scene and the intelligibility of their actions.

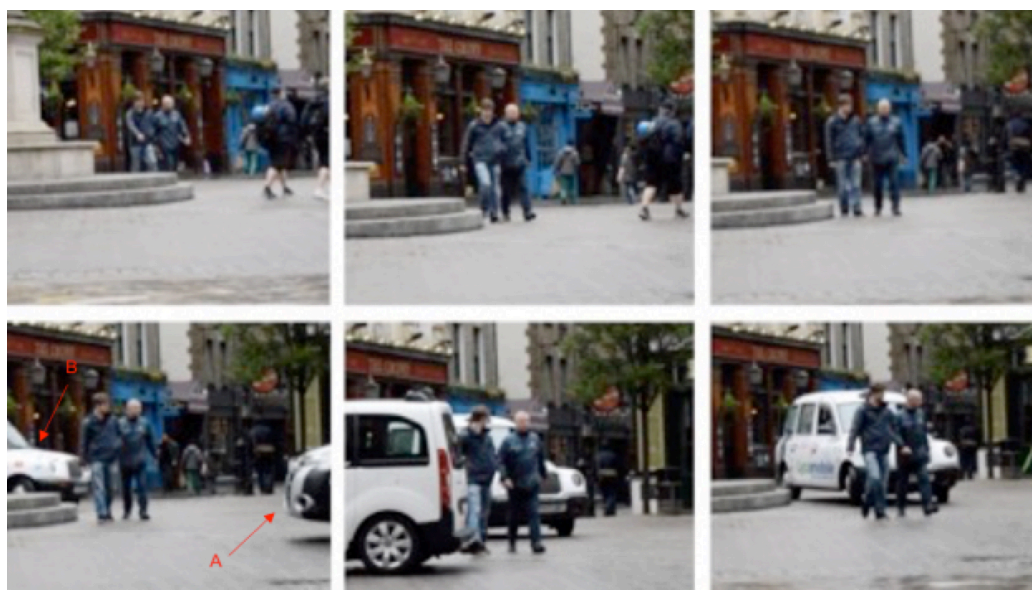


FIG. 4. a-f. (A = mini-van, B = taxi)

Source: Author’s Photo.

The member to right of the with orients his head to the left as he makes his way around the central island, “scanning” back across the space as he walks (fig. 4a-c). There is, perhaps, a division of labour in the doing and displaying of attention here as the member to the left appears to be “responsible” for a vector to their front,

whilst the man on the left takes care of his side and a more direct orientation to their trajectory (fig. 4a). Although it is not clear from the video exactly when the mini-van appears, we do see the pair share a joint orientation that they hold very briefly. The member on the left maintains his orientation to the van whilst the right-hand member quickly checks his position relative to the central island (fig. 4b) before returning his orientation to the mini-van (fig. 4c) and coming to a brief stop – seemingly in line with the central island (fig. 4d). His partner, slightly behind at this point, adjusts his own steps to stop in line with his partner. This is also done through a brief orientation to the central island in “settling” his position. This visible orientation to the central island suggests that they are aligning themselves with this material feature of the setting in order to co-ordinate their stop and “recruit” it in providing for an unambiguous path along which the mini-van can continue its trajectory. The co-ordination and completion of the stop takes place in less than a second, after which the pair co-ordinate a moving off together. They time this so that they pass close to the rear of the mini-van vehicle as it moves through the site (fig. 4e). This is not unlike the production of a “latched” next turn in conversation where the next speaker begins talking at precisely the point where the previous speaker ends their turn, providing for and displaying the ongoing flow of intersubjective understanding as the conversation and the rights of its participants. In the course of the noticing-orientation-stopping phasing they satisfactorily handle the trajectory of the mini-van, observable in their dropping of a visible orientation to it and entering into a second phase of scanning (fig. 4d) with the man on the left turning his head to the right and the man on the right to his left. There is no ongoing concern that the van will abruptly turn or do something highly unexpected such as reverse back around the centre point. The dropping of the attention exhibits something of the “natural attitude” [Schutz 1962] with which members themselves orient to the world; this organizational trouble is known and knowable, has been resolved and can be “disattended.” But note that this certainty in the stability of the world is a members’ accomplishment through and through.

The next phase finds them handle a second spatial trouble sequence. As the mini-van passes, the man on the left “sees” (perhaps hearing first – taxis have noisy diesel engines) a second vehicle approaching from behind (a white taxi; fig. 4e). Here the man on the left, after taking the lead in setting off from the temporary stop, displays the noticing (as we have seen in previous examples) to the driver by turning his head back over his left shoulder. This does something like holding their place within the ongoing flow of traffic whilst arranging the next actions. Indeed, once the noticing of the van is publically available, the pair organise themselves in relation to handling that noticing in and through the work of the trajectory. It is easy to assume and assert that they “must” do this. But this is to introduce an external

generalized principle to the setting. They would, of course, be equally successful in the task of crossing the space by not displaying any attention to co-movers at all by doing “being oblivious” to other users of the space [Liberman 2013]. In this instance, the with displays a noticing that has the procedural consequentiality of then having to deal with what they have “seen” as an accountable matter. Indeed, the noticing and its display occasions a shift in the trajectory, initiated by the man on the left, who begins to steer their trajectory to their left and away from the taxi by walking ahead of and slightly across his partner’s path (fig. 4f). It is worth noting that the trajectory of the taxi likely remains unclear at this point due to the multiple possibilities available and the lack of any mediated communication such as an indicator being turned on. This may, in part, account for the pairs’ continued orientation to the taxi (the turning of their heads over their left shoulders toward it (fig. 4f).

Similar work of displaying noticing and awareness, and the procedural consequentiality thereof, in the shared work of adjusting a trajectory is evident in the example below. In this example, two women are walking on a trajectory that would take them diagonally across the centre of the shared space. The trajectory encounters organisational trouble in the form of its intersection with that of a vehicle that arrives on the scene and also seems to turn on the repair of an “incorrect” orientation to the scene.



FIG. 5. a-f.

Source: Author’s Photo.

As the “with” leaves the edge of the setting – the “pavement area” – to cross the central space they are visibly engaged in a conversation. At the same time, they also display an orientation to the business of crossing the central space by actively “scanning” the scene. The woman on the right-hand side of the with orients her head toward a van that has arrived in the space (out of frame in the example, but visible in the video and in fig. 5f). On “seeing” the van the member to the right re-oriens her body toward her partner, away from the prior trajectory. This is tied to the observability of her partners’ continued commitment to the prior trajectory (readable through bodily alignment and lack of orientation to the trouble source of the van). The right-hand member “overrides” the commitment to the trajectory by placing a hand on her partner’s arm as she herself turns. This action, then, “steers” the with on to another trajectory (fig. 5d) away from that of the van. This adjustment requires the member on the left, who is now being “steered”, turning roughly 90° to her left. This gets done slightly “awkwardly” in that the walking is interrupted by a brief stop before reorienting with a sharp turn to the new trajectory (fig. 5d-f) whilst the other member’s hand remains on her arm, “guiding” this re-orientation (fig. 5e-f). She then fully orientates her own body and attention in visibly committing to the new trajectory (fig. 5f). The “planning” of this new trajectory, or rather its public display, is observable in the orientation of the head and fixed gaze toward the point to which the pair are to travel and displaying commitment to this new trajectory. This point is the nearest side of the crossing, subsequently recruited as a resource for the solving of the navigational trouble introduced by the van. This stage of the crossing of the space is described in the following section.

In addition to providing further examples of the embeddedness and consequentiality of “attention displays”, a key significance of these examples is in demonstrating the ways in which the management and production of “space” is co-produced in the negotiation of the trajectories. In the first example, the space produced by the with briefly stopping on their way, and that produced for the taxi in their adjustments to their trajectory (fig. 4) is recognizably an interactional accomplishment and the product of a concerted choreography. Again, this is not simply doing “getting out of the way” but the co-production and management of possible pathways for each party in and through the scene in a dynamic and motile sense. The possibilities for “doing getting out of the way” emerge from the prior sequences of actions and through the emergent formulations of category flow and articulation [Watson 2005]. And this work can in no way be seen as the product of the enactment of some prior or rational plan of action, but rather, emerges in and course of the practical, shared, and moment-by-moment building of the order of the setting.

## 7. Recruiting and Dismissing Resources

As visible in the examples above, Seven Dials is not a “pure” example of shared space design as it retains marked pedestrian crossings with belisha beacons on two of the seven streets that make up the “dials.” The crossings *are* then available to be “recruited” by people in the business of crossing the setting. These, and other, crossings have about them a categorical order in the sense that they are commonsensically “known” to be for “pedestrians” to do crossing the road viewed in and as a relational figuration of category-in-context [Hester and Eglin 1997; Smith 2017]. I am expressly *not* suggesting here that the crossing itself has “agency” within what might be called an “assemblage”, but rather that the relevancy of the crossing is accomplished in and through the specifics of its local practical use. And it is in this sense that the crossing might be said to provide pedestrians with additional “crossing rights” in relation to vehicles. As noted across the examples thus far, following the navigational troubles that arise for members in the examples above (fig. 4 and fig. 5), they adjust trajectories toward the pavement and the crossing, recruiting them as resources for solving that trouble.

In this first examples of this section I describe two instances, following directly from the sequences described above, where features of the setting are demonstrably consequential for the requirements of members to display “attention” to vehicles moving through the scene. We begin with the continued work of the with in handling the arrival/presence of the taxi (fig. 4, above) and the actions preceding and during their recruitment and use of the crossing.





FIG. 6. a-f.

Source: Author's Photo.

Following from the “noticing” of the van in the previous example, the left-hand member of the with displays a continuing orientation to the taxi through a slight turn of his head back and down to his left (fig. 6a). As they adjust their trajectory away from the path of the taxi (which we can note is not providing any communication of “where next” in terms of indicating), the left-hand member “speeds up” by taking visibly larger steps and right-hand member, who is “following,” initiates a “quickstep” for five steps (beginning in fig. 6a). The left-hand member remains “in the lead” of their trajectory toward a point at the edge of the space in what might be described as a “protection” position [see, Petersen and Butcher 2016]. Both this and the “quickstep” is demonstrably tied to the consequentiality of the noticing and movements of the taxi for the with and their ongoing work of doing walking *together* in this specific context. Whilst “getting out of the way,” the left-hand member maintains a display of orientation to the taxi by holding his head slightly to his left and then, as he crosses the path of the taxi, briefly to the right (fig. 6b). The man on the right of the with, when “out of the way” more directly orients to the taxi (fig. 6b) and checks the remainder of the space behind the taxi for other traffic (fig. 6d). He then gains the crossing and drops his orientation to the space and orients to his trajectory across the crossing (fig. 6e-f). His partner also makes a final check of the space (fig. 6e) which he holds for a couple of steps before also changing his orientation to the crossing.

In a second case, and following the reorientation of the trajectory toward the crossing, led by the woman on the right, the pair “recruit” the crossing as a resource in navigating the troubles posed by the arrival of the van.



FIG. 7. a-f.

Source: Author's Photo.

Although the consequentiality of the with moving on to the crossing from the perspective of the driver of the van is unclear, what is observable is that the pair, once on the crossing, drop an orientation to the van, orient to the destination (fig. 7c) and then are visibly engaged in a conversation (presumably not about their walking, or the van, or the crossing) (fig 7 d-f).

What we see in these examples (fig. 6 and fig. 7), is some of the ways in which “trust” operates for members, as a “[...] as a necessary background condition in a constitutive order” [Watson 2009, 479]. Without proceeding to treat trust as a precondition of *all* public interaction, we can note how, here, as part of the constitutive order of the setting there is a background expectancy that the “fact” of the pairs’ walking on the crossing is available and readable by other members for what it is and, thus, an occasion for those in vehicles to stop. In something like a subset of the second viewers’ maxim<sup>6</sup> [Sacks 1995a, 260], there appears to be in operation an aspect of the

<sup>6</sup> The second viewer’s maxim is: “If one sees a pair of actions which can be related by the operation of a norm that provides for the second given the first, where the doers can be seen to be



perceptual machinery that provides for the seeing of that action done in that setting or in relation to that resource as “belonging together” [Hester and Francis 2003].<sup>7</sup> “Pedestrians” walking on “crossings” produces particular obligations in both directions. Drivers are expected to stop, but walkers on the crossing must not to take “too long” or dawdle or drop things or stop to hold a conversation. This is not, of course, to say that these things *must* happen or that other things *cannot* happen, but such occurrences (a car passing straight through a crossing in front of a pedestrian, for example) would be a breach of “trusted” expectancies of participation in that scene. In another sense, we might consider how such “trust” is grounded in the practical organisation and distribution of what we might call “mobility rights” when moving in public space. As a shared accomplishment, mobilities in and through a particular setting both reflect and produce that order of a given scene; in this case, the shifting organisation of rights of way in relation to available and intersubjectively constituted material resources such as pedestrian crossing.

In developing the sense in which visual and material elements of the setting are a members’ resource and accomplishment, we might, then, consider examples where such resources, present and proximal to a member and their actions, are made *not* relevant for the business at hand. Such a recognition is significant in retaining the sense that the interactional work of members accomplishes what is referred to as “urban infrastructure” or “the traffic system” [Goffman 1972] in a no-time-out manner. The issue here is the intelligibility of the crossing as relevant for the ongoing organisation of affairs or as not relevant *right here and right now*. This also provides a further in which to see how that object and action are intelligible in and through one another in a relational and mutually elaborative configuration.

members of the categories the norm provides as proper for that pair of actions, then a) see that the doers are such Members and b) see the second as done in conformity with the norm.”

<sup>7</sup> Although I do not develop this further here, I have elsewhere described this as “category-relevant space” [Smith 2017].

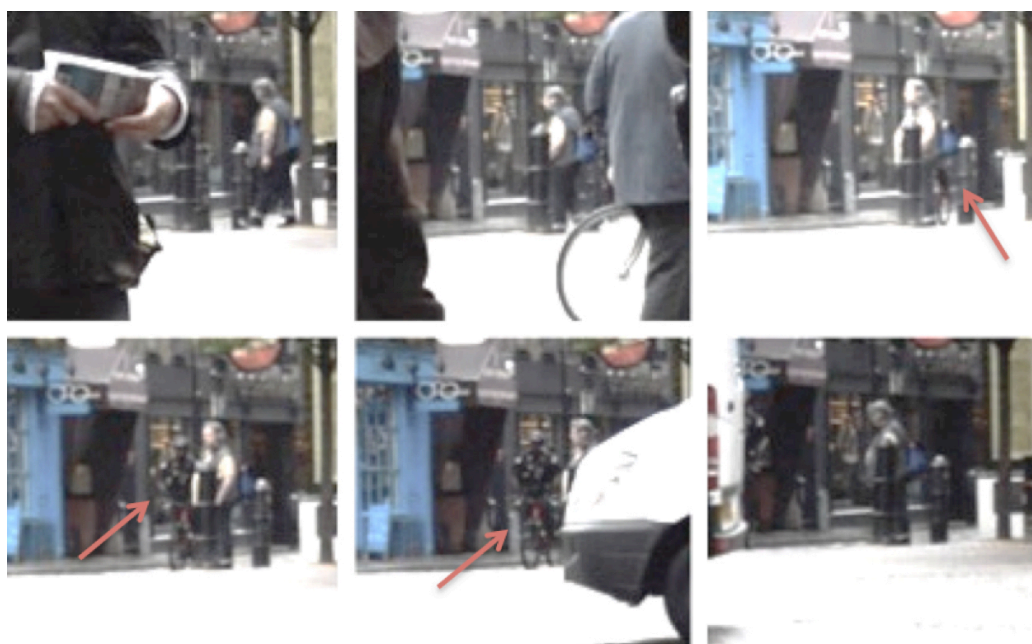


FIG. 8. a-f (Bicycle Highlighted with Arrow).

Source: Author's Photo.

In this example, a member is walking on the “pavement” at the edge of the central “road” area, and comes to a stop at the corner. On approaching the corner, there is a visible orientation to that street and a concern with its traffic (fig. 8a). This orientation is viewable as a bound activity of a “road crosser” (*that* orientation would be unnecessary if the woman was, for example, turning to the right to walk down it), or an “intention display” [Goffman 1972], occasioning other street traffic to slow down and stop in order to allow the crossing to get done. What happens, however, is that, early in the approach/orientation sequence, the woman “sees” a bike coming down the street (it becomes visible in fig. 8c) and, rather than engaging in and continuing an “attention display”, re-orient *away* from the bike and the road to be crossed and, thus, the business of the crossing the road. This is done through the turning of the head and then, in incremental movements, her body away from the crossing (fig. 8c), offering a withdrawal or retreat from the rights of crossing *at that moment*; the availability and consequentiality of which, visible in the bike “taking the slot” and passing through the crossing (fig. 8d). As it does so, there is a reorientation to the toward the crossing (fig. 8e) and the beginning of the sequence of crossing the road again through an orientation to the street’s traffic and the “intention” display in which it is embedded.

In addition to the continued concern with attention displays in relation to crossing the space, the significance of these examples is that the visual and material ele-

ments of the “furnished frame” [Goffman 1972] are taken by members to constitute “natural objects” only as made available and displayed in and through the concerted maintenance of their status-in-use [Ryave and Schenkein 1974]. Material elements of the commonplace scene do not “instruct” (or worse, structure) participants’ actions in the accomplishment of in a predefined course of action but, rather, are enrolled by the staff of a scene in producing for each other, then and there and only there and then, recognizable, collaboratively accomplished, displays of “normal” mobility as defined within and through that local scene. Material features of the setting are evidently only, and only ever, a *resource* for members as part of the “interactional ecology” [Nevile *et al.* 2014] of the scene. To return to Wes Sharrock’s [1995, 4] well known example of social order exhibited in and by a bus stop queue, we might note that members can readily organise standing at a bus stop in such a way that makes it abundantly clear to the driver of a bus (or any observer) that they are *not* waiting for *that* bus. Rather such material elements and spatial arrangements of a setting are at particular times in particular ways, recruited as resources for the motile organisation that is, the visually available display of “what and where next.”

## 8. Conclusion

This article has demonstrated an ethnomethodological analysis of the visually available order of mobility in public space by “drawing out from the foliage” the work of the “staff” [Garfinkel 2002] of a “shared space” intersection. Through the description of members’ methods, practices, and devices, the analysis aimed to specify the lived production of appearances that are routinely glossed in action and handled ironically in analysis, or, in other senses, overlooked entirely as trivial matters and “poor relatives” [Garfinkel and Sacks 1970] to grander sociological concerns with space.

The article drew from recent conversation analytic studies of mobility practices, and the sequential organisation of walking and talking in particular. It also developed insights from recent developments in ethnomethodological studies of categorization practices beyond talk [Watson 2005; Reynolds 2017; Evans and Fitzgerald 2017; Smith 2017]. In keeping with members’ own practices, the analysis incorporated both sequential and categorial concerns but did so within an ethnomethodological approach to the phenomena by focalising the work *of the setting as the setting’s work*, rather than the actions of individuals. For example, the article focused upon the intelligibility of next moves and trajectories as signature features of this mobile setting’s order and, specifically, demonstrated how the members’ method of “attention dis-

plays” are used in the coordination of movements in and through the setting. Such practices both produce and display the setting’s categorial moral order. The quickening of the pace in a “moral quickstep”, for example, was demonstrably designed for a specific category of viewer and was viewable as such in and through sequential-categorial organisation of action and the relational configuration of those movements, category, and setting. The analysis also demonstrated how the work of attention is both publically available and a collaborative accomplishment, done by pedestrians walking together in “withs”, and gets done in ways that account for, in an embodied sense, the emergent properties of the members’ movement within the scene. A key element of these practices was shown to be the ways in which they were bound to, made use of, and seeable in relation to material elements of the setting. Finally, and briefly, I demonstrated how actions can “dismiss” the relevancy of materials such as crossings. This will aspect requires further study, but it seems that they ways in which members’ practices can negate the “agency” of present available materials in a setting might be a necessary critique of some elements of Actor Network Theory that draws such analyses away from, and obscures, social practice.

As noted at the outset, beyond the description of the detail of the actions themselves considered as relevant for the purposes of interaction, the analysis has demonstrated, across the examples, a concern with the ways in which setting’s rules are displayed, adjusted, and followed by participants. Indeed, it is the indeterminacy of fixed formal rules of movement through the setting that render it a perspicuous setting for the study of the local development and use and adaptation of ethno-methods for managing mobility in urban space. The “rules” of the use of shared space, and present material resources, are dynamic and locally assembled, moment-by-moment, by its participants. The ways in which categories of “pedestrian” and “driver” relate to one another in motion, and in the use of the central space and the available “pavement” area *exhibit* and *accomplish* the moral order of the setting. In a related and radical manner, “space” can be seen to be *constructed for* the practical purposes of the setting’s social order. Space does not, in any meaningful sense, pre-exist those activities, and nor are the activities considered here to be understood in the limited sense of an individual’s interactional practices. In sum, this analysis has not aimed to add anything to the existing stock of social scientific theories of space and spatial organisation. The article has, however, made a distinct contribution to the corpus of studies concerning mobile interaction; an ethnomethodological contribution that has been concerned with the local building and exhibition of the lived and witnessable moral order of public space. And, in the context of this special issue, the article makes a recommendation to social scientists, urban planners and designers, and a whole range of other professionals concerned with public space, that they begin

again, and look for another first time, at the things people do to organise space and mobility.

### **Acknowledgements**

*I would like to thank participants of the MOBSIN network meetings, and Paul McIlvenny in particular, for their critical, useful, comments on early stages of this analysis.*

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## **Left to Their own Devices? The Practical Organisation of Space, Interaction, and Communication in and as the Work of Crossing a Shared Space Intersection**

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**Abstract:** This article considers space, interaction, and communication in specific relation to the work of crossing a shared space intersection. After outlining an ethnomethodological approach to space, the article draws on video materials produced in Seven Dials, London, UK, to describe the lived detail of practices that are constitutive of and display the visually available moral order of the scene. The analysis, in particular, focuses upon embodied practices such as: the display of “attention” to other users of the space and the consequentiality thereof; how people do “getting out of the way” in a highly ordered and contextualized manner; and how people “recruit” and accomplish material and spatial resources in and as the work of the crossing. The broader contribution of the article to a sociology of space is, thus, an examination of the relational configuration of mutually constitutive orders of embodied practice, spatiality and materiality in the practical production of the everyday, visually available order of public space treated as a members’ phenomenon and concern, through and through.

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*Keywords:* Space; Interaction; Mobility; Walking; Attention Displays; Materiality.

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